WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 FEBRUARY 1991

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

Photo by John Rietz

"Museum on Main Street" en route from Wall Street, June 10, 1990.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

FUND RAISING OFF TO GREAT START--$188,000 IN TOWARD $400,000 GOAL: WORK PARTY SET MARCH 2

We're planning a party!--a *work* park party that is. Plan to join us on Saturday, March 2, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. at the Museum on Main Street, 500 North Main, for a clean-up party. You can help by providing some essential elbow grease.

It will be a good opportunity to see the inside of the house "as is." We'll clean up any leftover construction debris, scrape peeling wallpaper and generally give the interior a thorough scrubbing, mopping and housecleaning throughout.

Even if it is a cold day we'll be warm. The house now has temporary heat put in place by Frank Johnson of Robertson-Morrison, Inc. We are most grateful to him as we are to everyone who has donated goods or services needed during the construction process.

Our fund raising campaign is off to a great start. Thanks to each and everyone of you who responded to our December appeal for contributions to the museum. We have raised $114,000 of contributions to date, not including pledges.

This amount, added to the approximately $74,000 we had in our museum fund initially, means we have $188,000 toward our goal of $400,000.

If you would like to contribute to the museum effort, you can send a check payable to the Museum on Main Street Building Fund to:

NBD Ann Arbor
Attention: Mr. Eugene Fowler
P.O. Box 8601
125 South Main Street
Ann Arbor, Mi 48107-8601

If you would like additional brochures or other information, please contact Pauline Walters at the WCHS office 662-9092.

Karen O'Neal
665-2242

ALSACE-LORRAINE TOPIC

Peter Schaldenbrand, president of Farmington Genealogy Society, will speak on "Alsace-Lorraine" at the Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County at 2 p.m. Sunday, February 24 at Washtenaw Community College.

Meeting in Lecture Hall II, Liberal Arts and Science Building. Class on preserving photographs led by Nancy Goff following. Business meeting 1:30 p.m.

ANN ARBOR'S KIT HOMES WCHS'S FEBRUARY TOPIC

Time was when you could order almost anything from a Sears or Montgomery Ward catalogue, even a house. Some Ann Arborites did.

Grace Shackman, a writer for the *Ann Arbor Observer* and unofficial historian of Ann Arbor architecture, will discuss those "kit homes" at the WCHS February 17 meeting at 2 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE NEW LOCATION: The meeting will be in the new Job Skills and Campus Events Building at Washtenaw Community College off Huron River Drive opposite St. Joseph Mercy Hospital. It is at the far east end of campus.

From Ann Arbor on Huron River Drive go past all WCC entrances until the road curves south toward Clark road, then enter right to parking lots. Meeting in room 141 just to right in lobby. Refreshments. Information: 663-8826.

DOLLHOUSE DISPLAYED IN STORE WINDOWS

The WCHS Board has voted to have a plexiglass case made to exhibit the Victorian-style dollhouse made and given by Lewis Hodges.

It was displayed in Jacobson's and Kline's store windows during the Christmas season. Pam Tabbaa, collections chairman, Elizabeth Dusseau and Karen O'Neal set it up. Thanks to Erick Trippe, Ken Zagata and Jeff Wurst for carrying the very heavy dollhouse around and the stores for donating space.

WHAT IS IT? GAME OFFERED SCHOOLS, GROUPS

WCHS offers a traveling exhibit of small artifacts set up as a humorous "What is it?" game to schools for children and another for adults.

They are available for classes and meetings. For information call Arlene Schmid, 665-8773.

B-24 LIBERATOR - A WHALE OF A BOMBER

By and large the B-24 Liberator Bomber was a great airplane but it was hard work to fly it, a former World War II pilot told the November WCHS audience.

"It wallowed around like a whale," John Debbink, now a retired General Motors Company vice-president living in Ann Arbor, said of the planes that made Willow Run famous.

Debbink, who flew 35 missions, talked about his wartime experiences after Flavia Reps, a Washtenaw Community College history teacher, showed a couple of videos about the Bomber Plant and the plane.

Ms. Reps came to teach at WCC 25 years ago when it first opened in temporary quarters in the former Willow Village which had been hastily built to accommodate Bomber Plant workers. First her office was in a former bowling alley, then in a Quonset hut.

That sparked her interest in the history of Willow Run. She has conducted a long-term study including 30-some oral history interviews with people who were there then.

She has accumulated three file cases full in her basement plus a good deal of archival material stored at WCC.

Her pursuit of information led her to the Imperial War Museum in England among other places. She found lots of news wire service photos of the plane in action but could not find out which planes were built at Willow Run and which at Consolidated Aircraft in California.

She was told she would need the serial number on the plane. She learned later from a student who had been a fireman who set fire to the documents, that the federal government had ordered all strategic information about the war plants destroyed. Ford World Headquarters could not give her information either.

(During the question period, someone in the audience who had flown in B-24s said the planes made at Willow Run had "Ford Motor Company" on the steering column.)

"The folklore about Willow Run was "will it run?"--a plane that has a 110 foot wing span and weighed 36,500 pounds before loading with bombs and ammunition," Ms. Reps said.

"It was created on a production line that the government asked Ford if he could do and eventually the workers produced one plane an hour which is a phenomenal idea to me."

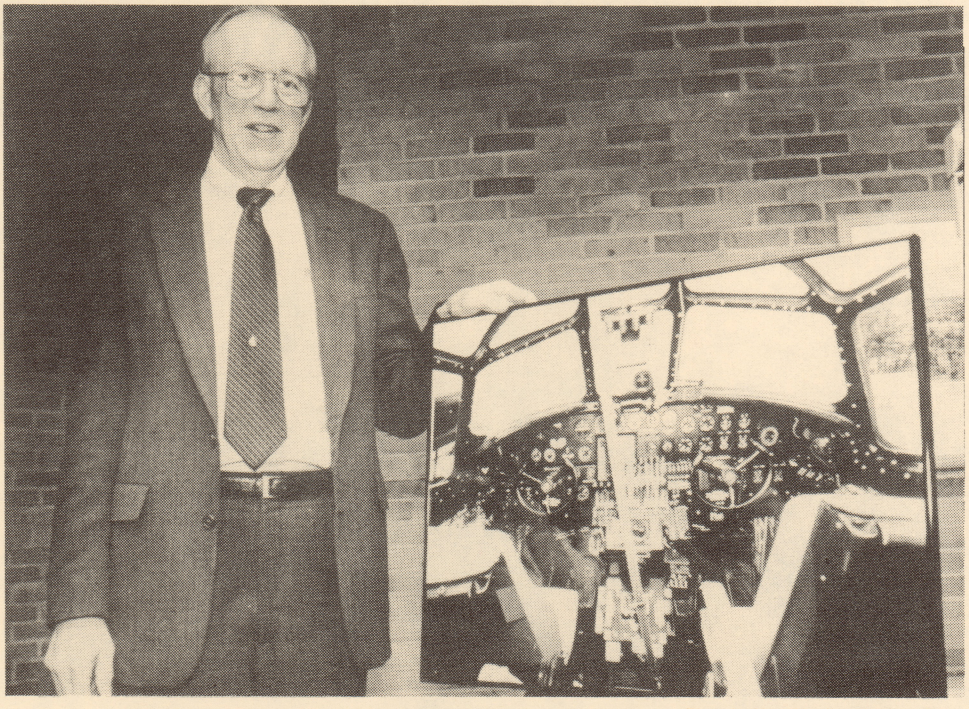


Photo by Mark Mueller, Ypsilanti Press

John Debbink, onetime B-24 pilot, poses with his B-24 cockpit picture.

Before the plant about 16,000 families lived in the Ypsilanti-Willow Run area. Washtenaw county needed to accommodate housing for many of the 42,000 workers and their families when the plant was producing a plane an hour.

"Housing problems often came close to a nightmare. On August 25, 1942 a *Washtenaw Post Herald* headline screamed "Grapes of Wrath in Washtenaw County."

"The county had evicted 150 war workers from a makeshift tent camp put up in an orchard a half-mile from the plant after attacks of dysentery there claimed the life of a child. A month later dormitories and temporary housing were on the drawing boards."

If you read the newspapers of the day, there were many political conflicts, she said, between old and new residents, about the UAW (United Auto Workers Union), about housing and so on.

The bomber plant opened in April 1942. It was months before temporary housing, dorms and an infirmary were built.

"The idea of the Liberator was conceived in 1939 when General Hap Arnold invited Consolidated Aircraft in California to come up with a superior design, better than Boeing's Flying Fortress. A prototype of the B-24 was made the same year."

As they kept adapting the plane it went through several changes, each new model designated with an added letter from "D" to "J".

A large number of the 2,708 B-24s built by Douglas Aircraft in California were B-24 Ds. The early "Ds" had a hand held nose gun, lower turret and four other guns.

"Ford produced 480 of the "Es", the first to be fitted with the nose turret as seen in the first video.

The second video showed the interior of the restored B-24 J that visited Willow Run airport last June. Most planes produced by Ford were B-24 Js, she said.

The second video was made and narrated by Ron Cain, head of the audiovisual department at WCC.

"The B-24 had four huge engines and carried ten 50 caliber machine guns. In the cockpit we had a pilot and a navigator," Cain said. A small arm stuck out for a windspeed indicator. There was a side or waist gunner on either side.

He pointed out features as he walked up and down in the plane--an air deflector in front of the door, bomb doors, the nose turret and beneath that the area for the bombardier, and positions of the waist and tail gunners.

The tail gunner had very little pro-

tection, he noted. The waist gunners quarters, where two men would stand, have been described as "like two men with jackhammers in a telephone booth."

An engine model showed the rotary engines were composed of two rows of nine cylinders. (An earlier model was composed of one row of nine cylinders.) The valves were at the top of the cylinders. The long rods were push rods going down to the cam wheel.

You could see the rolls of ammunition that fed from boxes into each gun. Holes in the boxes showed the rounds left.

By the bomb bays were diagrams for loading different size bombs. Several dummy bombs were in position. The bomb bay doors would open and roll up the side of the plane when bombs were to be released.

The individual sitting in the front turret could control the rotation of the turret and vertical motion of the guns.

Looking through the front canopy one could see the Norden bombsight. It included a two-and-a-half power telescope to sight down to the ground before giving orders to release the bombs.

There was a fire extinguisher hooked up for remote control from the cockpit, life preservers, first aid kits, electrical heaters for flight suits, oxygen masks, bottles of oxygen.

There were electrical relays, wiring and, in the center of the plane, a small catwalk for crew members to walk back and forth.

The cockpit had a big bank of gauges, electrical and hydraulic lines. Some of the services were controlled by cable running back to the rudder and stabilizers. Right behind one of the cockpit seats was space for the telecommunications individual-transmitter, desk and seat.

Outside you could see the lower or belly turret. The person sitting there would be lowered about three feet and from there would be expected to cover any incoming planes.

Mr. Debbink brought a big framed color photograph of a B-24 cockpit his wife had given him on his last birthday.

"I joined the aviation cadets, trained as a pilot, flew my missions, came home and was discharged before I was old enough to vote. I haven't thought about this for a long time," he said.

A number of people raised their hands when he asked how many worked at Willow Run. Several flew in B-24s.

"Those of us who did pilot the planes felt a good bit of affection for them. I got my factory fresh plane at Topeka, Kansas. I had to sign a statement of charges like you did for everything in the army. I was charged $270,000---you couldn't touch that plane for 27 million today."

He was surprised he also had to sign separately for the four engines. He later learned that engines were very expendable.

"The B-24 was really the first modern plane built. It was built as a bomber. It wasn't an evolution of a passenger plane like the B-17. It was started in 1939. The first prototype flew in twelve months after the Army gave the specifications of what they wanted and it was in production in a year and a half.

"It was the first plane with a tricycle landing gear. It made a big difference, as those of you who are pilots know, between flying a tail dragger and flying a tricycle landing gear plane.

"You could see when you taxi and it had a number of other advantages from the standpoint of stability and landing.

"The B-24 had a very long, narrow wing called the Davis wing. It was a revolutionary development. When they first tested that wing at Cal Tech they thought the instruments were off they had such remarkable results from it but since then it has become the predominant wing in most aircraft.

"It was the development of a guy who didn't even have an aeronautical engineering degree by the name of David Davis. There were a lot of industrial heroes in that day who just did things.

"The B-24 was a good airplane. In all honesty it wasn't as rugged as the B-17 and couldn't fly as high. It could fly faster but what made it a great airplane was the great engines. The Pratt & Whitney 1830 was a superb engine, better than on the B-17.

"B-17s used to blow cylinder heads on takeoff and were limited on what they could pull on takeoff. The B-24 had great takeoff. If they had put those Pratt & Whitney engines on the B-17 then they'd have an airplane.

"It did have some deficiencies. It had insufficient rudder. Late in the war they developed a navy version that had a great big single tail and that plane could fly.

"It wasn't as rugged as the B-17. You used to see B-17s come home with pieces out of them that a B-24 probably couldn't stand.

"On the other hand, most of us who were pilots of B-24s wouldn't have traded it for the B-17. We used to tell B-17 pilots that any grandmother could fly a B-17.

"Earlier in the program you saw some statistics that it could fly 300 miles per hour. I never saw one fly over 170 miles per hour unless they were about to crash, but it could go a long way. Our missions were typically eight, nine or ten hours.

"It was not an easy plane to fly. Two thirds of the weight, other than the plane itself, was fuel. We had 2,700 gallons of fuel so we ended up with about 20,000 pounds of fuel and 10,000 pounds of bombs.

"We used to take off at 70,000 pounds and come home at about 40,000 pounds. Obviously the trip coming home was a lot more pleasant than the trip going out.

"You heard some mention of waist guns. Well, I've got to tell you waist guns are useless--like squirting around the sky with a flexible gun. Turrets were entirely different. They had a computing sight to help set dials right. He had a chance of hitting something. The waist gunners never hit anything.

"One other problem. In the turrets, as the gun came across, they had a stop. There was nothing to interrupt those waist gunners. If they got excited they might saw your tail off.

"That isn't to say the waist gunners are useless. They had other jobs and threw out chaff.

"There were about 18,000 B-24s built altogether. There were about 12,000 claims to have shot down fighter planes. Those were whittled down to about 3,617 confirmed. Even that number is problematical, he thinks.

"A number of B-24s went to the Navy. It was a lot easier to confirm a submarine sinking than a fighter plane shot down. By actual confirmation, B-24s got 800 submarines.

"Also, Canadians and Brits had some B-24s for submarine control. They actually sank 167 subs out of B-24s.

"Probably one of the first things heard about B-24s was June 12, 1942 when they got 13 of the early model "Ds" together and flew them out of Egypt to Ploiesti, Romania, oil refineries. Seven planes came back.

"British intelligence reported next day the plant was in full operation but the raid got a lot of publicity--it was

one of those things like Doolittle's raid on Japan--a sort of public relations thing to show Americans could do things.

"The next serious raid was the famous low level attack on Ploiesti August 1, 1943, from Africa. Of 164 planes that went out, 54 of them were lost.

"A week later British intelligence reported that of seven principal targets, "six" and "seven" were destroyed to the point of being out of business for six months, but targets one to five were back in business the next day."

WHEN CHRISTMAS TREE TINSEL WENT TO WAR

"Those of you who are old enough to remember, in World War II there was no more Christmas tree tinsel. The reason was we were throwing it out all over Europe," John Debbink, former B-24 pilot, said.

"People in Vienna had plenty of tinsel. The idea was the tinsel was an anti-radar device, still used to this day, incidentally. You were supposed to throw it out at a prescribed rate, such as every 15 seconds.

"You know Americans, if a little was good, a lot was better. They used to throw it out by shovelfuls. It was called "chaff" by flyers."

Their targets in the 15th Air Force in Italy were primarily factories, power plants and oil refineries. Their principal opposition in the air came from Messerschmidt 109s and they thought the Messerschmidt factory was great target.

"You had to fly the B-24 all the time. There was no power assist. You had to turn the wheel a long way to make that thing tilt ten degrees. A 30 degree bank was an acrobatic stunt but it was a great plane when it was empty.

"In training, when we flew with 40,000 pounds off 7,000 foot concrete runways, that was great. When we got in combat and had 5,000 feet of dirt and a fully loaded plane that was something entirely else. Probably the greatest hazard of the whole mission was getting it off the ground."

They had taken over a German fighter field. The Germans had laid it out to about 4,000 feet. "We squeezed it out to about 5,000 feet of dirt and put 1,000 feet of steel mat at each end to give a little better start or finish."

"We were supposed to take off at 30 second intervals, so as you climbed and rendezvoused you weren't scattered all over the sky. Taking off at 30 second intervals has one problem--you are still in the prop wash of the plane ahead.

"If you were going directly into a headwind, there as no way you wanted to take that B-24 off into prop wash--you would wallow around and it was a chancy, life and death situation.

"The colonel would always be there with his stop watch waving you off at 30 second intervals. If you could gain five or ten seconds on the colonel you had a better chance of not finding the prop wash.

"It's just amazing how every time the colonel was ready to drop his arm, you were looking over at the temperature gauge or something. The next day he'd be chewing you out--"Debbink, why did it take you 42 seconds to move?":

"Incidentally, when preparing for takeoff, you stood on your brakes and ran your engines up and ran the turbochargers up to almost maximum power and then you let her go to get maximum lift.

"I learned my first good lesson in management in the Air Force. Coming in from the mission you didn't care how you got down--you just wanted to get on the ground. You were very tired after eight or nine hours in the air.

"Some engines might be out, you might be very low on gas, you might have wounded people on board. The only thing we would give way for was, if one of our buddies had an engine out, we'd let him get in first.

"As a result we were hitting that runway all over. A lot of times we weren't hitting that steel mat. We were hitting on dirt. You had to slam on your brakes and stop before you got to the end of the runway.

It would chew up the runway and they'd be scraping and bulldozing all night long trying to get it back in shape. The colonel was death on landing off the steel.

Then they got a West Pointer as deputy group commander. Colonel Large looked the situation over and solved it in two days. He realized that the scarcest commodity at that time was beer.

He had them paint a two-foot wide yellow stripe across the steel mat 500 feet in. He announced that the pilot who comes closest to the yellow line gets a case of beer.

"That solved the problem. In fact we sometimes got yellow paint on our tires we were so good at it.

"He solved the takeoff problem too. He had a common sense approach. He said, Look guys, I know there's no way you can take off in 30 second intervals when there's a head wind. Then, I'm going to give you forty seconds. If its a quartering wind, a little bit off, it will be 35.

"Flying in formation was tough. It was hard work. It was delicate work. My co-pilot and I took turns--15 minutes on, 15 minutes off.

"The nearest analogy I can think of to flying the formation is if you were going down I-94, say seven trucks in a box, the way we flew--one plane here, two below it, three below that and one tail end.

"If you went down I-94 in three lanes seven of them, going 75 miles an hour, trying to keep within ten feet of each other, and you don't have any brakes--all you can use is your power.

"It was hard work. At the same time you had pretty good incentive to do it. The main reason you wanted to fly in formation is you wanted your bombs to be concentrated on the target."

Going and coming from the bomb run there were always those ME 109s up there and the tight formation was designed to concentrate the guns for better defensive fire power. It was easier to pick of the guy flying the largest formation.

"It was very difficult if you once got out of formation. In fact, seniority killed more crews in war than almost anything else. New pilots who came over and joined your groups had low seniority. Pilots who already had 15, 20 or 25 missions had seniority--they were calling the shots.

"You came over there with a nice new model J airplane and they were flying a G or H, they requisitioned it on you. The guy with highest seniority had first pick of planes.

"That way the experienced guy had the best plane. The inexperienced pilot had the worst plane. He also had to fly at the back of the squadron. You had to work your way up to lead.

So the guy flying in last or second last position got the worst plane, doesn't

know what he's doing and he gets out of formation. He's flying about as fast as he can. How is he going to catch up?

"They cut the corners. You were always dodging around the centers of flak. If you were going up to Regensburg you had to avoid Graz, Salzburg, Vienna and Linz. The navigator could tell you you were 17 minutes from a ten degree left turn and you could shave that corner.

"You did learn to respect the plane--what it could do, what it couldn't do. By and large it was a great airplane. We were proud of it but its probably not entirely accurate to say that it was the workhorse of the Air Corps.

VIDEO TELLS WILLOW RUN STORY FROM FORD FARM TO WARTIME PRODUCTION MIRACLE OF A BOMBER AN HOUR AROUND THE CLOCK

"This is the story of Willow Run, one of the Ford farms that virtually overnight became the largest aircraft plant that had ever been built," narrator Harry Wismer said in the first video shown by Ms. Reps. (It was converted to video from a film made by Ford Motor Company.)

"Here, before our freedom and security were challenged by war, boys were learning a trade, being productive and responsible Americans.

"They were taught to till the land and plow a straight furrow, guided by farm experts, aided by modern machinery. The boys at the Willow Run Farm planted, grew and harvested the finest produce.

"In the early spring they tapped the sugar maples, collected the rising sap and took it to the nearby sugar house where it was converted to maple products. Then came the threat of war.

"The sugar house, the maples and the farm were sacrificed to make room for a plant designed to produce one Consolidated Liberator bomber every hour.

"Thousands of skilled workers were employed, pouring 100,000 yards of concrete, erecting 38,000 tons of structural steel, fitting miles of piping, running more miles of electric cable to operate the thousands of machines that were to be installed in this truly giant structure.

"The Army Air Forces asked Ford to undertake mass production of this bomber in addition to other weapons produced by the company which included troop-carrying gliders, turbo-superchargers and 2,000 horsepower Pratt & Whitney aircraft engines.

"This 80-acre plant was built in record time. In reality it was two plants under one roof--a manufacturing plant and an assembly plant.

"Now famous Willow Run air field covers 1,434 acres and provides 280 acres of concrete runways and taxi strips, enough to make a two lane concrete highway 120 miles long.

"And this was Willow Run's product--a giant flying machine for which the plant was so carefully tuned that it could produce one every 55 minutes.

"This is the Army Air Forces Liberator heavy bomber--this great aircraft, 110 feet from wingtip to wingtip and 67 feet four inches from nose to tail, was powered by four 1,200 horsepower air cooled engines. It could carry ten men, four tons of bombs, and 5,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition at better than 300 miles per hour at high altitude. (See Debbink's remarks.)

"The B-24, as it is officially designated, can fly 3,000 miles non-stop."

"As the pilot and control tower prepare to bring you down, we will soon see for ourselves how this modern miracle of mass production can then perform," the narrator said.

"Okayed by the tower and lined up with the runway, we are bringing in the bomber at better than 100 miles an hour.

"The pilot again calls the control tower and is assigned a position on the apron. As we taxi to this berth we pass just part of the day's production waiting to be tested by Ford pilots.

"The flags wave our pilot to his position and we are grounded at fabulous Willow Run Airport.

"At the entrance to the administration building, one mile away from the landing apron at the other end of the plant, a plaque proves that the Army Air Forces and Ford were ready when war came. It says "dedicated June 16, 1941," six months before Pearl Harbor.

"In the offices of the Army Air Forces and in that of the Ford superintendent a close check was kept on the movement of assembly lines with a master board. Numbered movable models showed the step-by-step progress of nearly 100 bombers which were always progressing down through the plant's assembly line.

"To teach these workers how, a half million dollar school was built adjoining the plant. More that 50,000 workers were graduated in from one to ten subjects by this school organized to do this vital job. Ford had to provide hundreds of instructors to teach more than fifty courses.

"Workers learned about the complicated aircraft hydraulic system and the mysteries of aircraft electronics."

A chart showed how Ford production men "cut up" the Liberator into major assembly sections--center wing, nose, fuselage, engines, tail and outerwing.

"Back in 1941 it was believed impossible to build a bomber as big as the Liberator in an hour, in fact in several hours. Even the conception of a plant such as this was viewed with considerable skepticism.

"But the people at Ford had vision as well as skill. They have always planned and worked on broad scale, have always struck out on pioneering paths and they are wise in the ways of mass production.

"Of course this was something new in assembly, not just another relatively simple automobile with only 15,000 or so parts to be made and assembled. Each of these machines is made up of 1,225,000 parts and each had to be perfect.

"In these assembly lines you see the evidence of another Ford-made miracle. The Willow Run Bomber plant has furnished one of the miracle production stories of this war. It produced 8,685 bombers in a steady stream, relentless, unceasing, on time, as methodical as a great river fed by its tributaries."

HOW TO JOIN WCHS

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to Washtenaw County Historical Society to : WCHS Membership, 122 South Main, Suite 250, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1903. Information:662-9092.

Annual dues are $10, individual; $18 a couple. Senior individual (60) $8, senior couple, $14. Sustaining dues $50, commercial, $25 and student, $5. Only one of a couple need be 60.

TOYS—AMERICAN ART FORM, GOOD INVESTMENT

Toys are an indigenous American art form and a worthy investment to the area's premier toy collector, Bob Lyons.

Lyons talked about the history of collecting from an investor's point of view at the December WCHS meeting, then invited the audience to go with him to the nearby exhibit of his toys in the UM Art Museum.

He was born in Ann Arbor. His parents, two sisters, aunts and uncles went to school here. His grandfather had graduated from UM Law School in 1896.

"I'm the only dropout the family's ever seen, though I did attend."

His late mother was very proud of graduating from UM in 1928 and earning a degree in library science in 1968.

"She used to be so impressed with the time she spent here in Clements Library. I thought she would really be impressed if she thought her son, the ditch digger, was speaking here."

Lyons heads Michigan Trenching Service, Inc., on Morgan Road in Pittsfield township. "We work for utility companies--gas, telephone, electric--putting their things underground for them."

"The company allows me the wherewithal to go mess around with toys and to have a certain (charitable) involvement in the community."

"I started collecting seriously when I was 14. We moved from McBain to Kalamazoo and my great aunt had a 1916 Hudson Super Six robin's egg blue touring car.

"I took the fenders off, top off, windshield off, painted it red, white and blue and burnt the engine up. It ended up in the junk yard.

"Somebody said, "you really messed up a nice car, Bob." From that point on I had a lot of respect for old things and their value."

"When I was first married I remember telling myself we ought not to buy a chrome dinette set--we should buy a bent wire ice cream set. It will always be worth what we paid for it or more.

"You know the result of that. I have a son who said, "You know, I just ran into the darndest thing--a dinette set with original chrome and original vinyl seats for only $400!

"That just points up the change that is taking place in the collecting business. It's hard to keep up.

"After I got up through the `30s or maybe World War II things, I quit collecting. After that I don't have any knowledge of the collectibility of toys or anything else really.

"I'm still out there trying to find that diamond in the rough. It gets harder and harder, but the need of a true collector for an antique fix is everlasting.

"To resolve that I quit collecting toys, specifically, and banks, tin cans and tools, bells, fire department memorabilia, automobiliana, airplaniana and railroadiana and I decided I'm going to collect an old store.

"So when I go antiquing I can at least find something to put on the store shelf. It's so much fun to find something and stick it up on the shelf, all the time it being an investment.

"If I see a pair of ladies' high button or lace-up shoes I don't buy them if they are more than $27 because I'm thinking investibility. The price of such shoes is all over the map--from $10 to $12 to $70 to $80.

"The difference between an investible and a collectible is that you really have to go out and sell something once in a while.

"If you want to have some fun come spend a few days with me when I drop out every year for three weeks. I have a van and trailer. I have card tables and visqueen price tags and junk. I head east to Pennsylvania and I hustle this junk.

"It keeps me up to speed a little bit on values and that's what is so significant about investibles is values.

"There was nothing written, no price guides, no valuations on toys or banks back when I started in the late `60s. This little fraternity of toy bank collectors was very closely knit. Believe it or not, we made the market on this stuff.

"It was so much fun to go to a toy train collector's meet where all that train stuff is priced and catalogued. They would have these delicious old iron toys or tin toys or banks or foreign toys they didn't know anything about.

"I literally have bought toys for $50 that I have sold for $5,000. That's what keeps antique dealers cranking. That was the first phase.

"The middle phase of toy collecting was when price guides started to come out. It spurred a raft of price guides which made everybody an expert.

"The third phase I'm having a hell of a time staying in touch with. Toys are changing hands for $1 million for one toy. It was an early tin hand-painted American toy in the form of a fire department hose reel.

"If you read the trade periodicals you'll see it. The guy that sold it for $125,000 was practically orgasmic with the price he got. That guy sold it for $250,000 to a guy that sold it to an Englishman for a million.

"Collectibility has been prostituted by people who have so much money they don't know what to do with it and they know their portfolio has to be broadened a little bit to include some things.

"I learned from Iver Schmidt's father (of Schmidt's Antiques) that no matter how tough the economy is good things will always have value.

"There are a lot of toy clubs like there are historical societies. There are opportunities to learn, share and understand the business. The Antique toy Collectors of "America are so classy they only let 12 people in a year. I've been part of them for 20 years."

As an iron toy collector, Lyons was not impressed with WCHS toys under the Clements Library Christmas tree (after all, he's not interested in dolls and such which predominated).

Most collectors are not interested in friction toys, he said, though one under the tree had "nice cast iron figures."

The one iron toy that most interested him turned out, on closer inspection, not to be old, but a heavier, coarser copy of an old toy.

His favorite toy? A 1924 La France (fire) pumper (full size) that he likes to bang around in in parades and around the neighborhood after a football game.

At the art museum, where about three dozen of his toys were selected for exhibit by the museum, he called attention to the "Amos and Andy" taxicab. It was inspired by the radio program of Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll.

When the taxi is wound up it goes ahead, then stops and "wiggle, wiggle-wiggles." That toy was the salvation of the Marx Toy Company, he said.

They spent $250,000 tooling up to make it. They sold thousands and thousands. Today that toy, in that condition, the market value is probably $600.

While he had been interested primarily in cast iron toys, he had trains of several different materials--wood, tin, iron, pull toy and tin clockwork.

In the cars of one toy train was a little set of blocks or puzzle pieces that assemble into a picture. The picture is of a little girl pulling that train on the floor.

In mechanical banks, you put a coin in, you push a lever and something happens. The most interesting one, he said, is the William Tell Bank.

When you cock the crossbow, his head goes down, you put a penny on top of the bow, you pull the trigger and it knocks an apple off the son's head as it rings a bell when it goes into the tower.

"It would go 'bang' if there was a cap in it. It is one of the most entertaining mechanical banks but hardly the rarest."

Probably the most valuable toy on display was the Spanish-American War era toy, "Uncle Sam and the Don." Uncle Sam and the Don are standing on a platform on four wheels. Each has in his hand a stick with a bell on the end. "These two guys are going at each other."

"I paid $55 for that in an antique shop years ago." One of his friends told Lyons he wouldn't have paid that for it. Today its a $5,500 toy.

HOLIDAY GIFT SHOP SET UP AT KERRYTOWN

WCHS had a temporary gift shop at Kerrytown Saturdays November 24 to December 19 at which they not only sold tee-shirts and notecards sporting the Greek Revival doorway of the soon-to-be Museum on Main Street but also increased community awareness and enthusiasm.

Karen O'Neal and Marguerite Harms set up shop. Marguerite and Elaine Sims, assisted by Marty Evashevski, prepared the sales items.

Volunteers salespersons were Reeva Cranor, Elizabeth Dusseau, Ella Grenier, Marjorie Hepburn, Barbara Mueller, Peter and Kay Rocco, Pauline Walters and Marguerite and Elaine.

WCHS TEE SHIRTS, CARDS, ORNAMENTS ON SALE

Museum on Main Street tee shirts, notecards and extra Christmas tree ornaments are on sale at the WCHS office in the Goodyear Building, 122 South Main, Suite 250 (at the top of the escalator on second floor).

Adult tee shirts, large and extra large, are $10. Small, medium and large children's are $6. Notecards are 75 cents each or $3.50 for five. Ornaments are $5. The office is generally open 9 a.m.- 5 p.m. Office phone is 662-9092.

CHRISTMAS TREE, THOUGH UNIQUELY DECORATED, DID NOT WIN BUT NETTED $139 FOR WCHS

Pat Jakunas and Pat Johnson, Ann Arbor teachers, designed and made white ceramic "cooky cutter cut-outs" of the Museum on main Street for the Christmas tree WCHS decorated at Englander's Furniture Store.

Besides those the tree was decorated with antique cooky cutters, red ribbons, baby's breath and white lights. An antique quilt "skirt" set the tree off.

We earned $139 with your votes. We did not win the $1,000, $500 or the $250 prize money awarded by Englander's to groups whose trees received the most dollar votes.

The winning organizations (Ann Arbor Ballet Theater, Ann Arbor Symphony and Women's City Club) all had votes in excess of $4,000 so we were not even close.

But we are glad that so many of you did go to Englanders to vote $1 for our tree.

Helping decorate the tree were Liz Colone, Angela del Vecchio, Marty Evashevski, Lois Foyle, Barbara Mueller, Kay Rocco, Jean Smith and Pauline Walters.

Photo by Barb Mueller

WCHS's Christmas tree at Englander's.

TRUNKS, VIOLIN GIVEN

Two Ann Arborites recently gave artifacts to WCHS.

Mrs. Nancy Reynolds gave three steamer trunks and a small box of early 20th century handmade clothing that had belonged to her aunt, Katherine Humphrey Townsend of Cheyenne, Wyoming, who was born in Saginaw in 1891.

Ken Mayne gave a violin with case and two bows that belonged to his grandfather, Linden Delos Arnold, of New York state.

'GERMAN ANCESTORS' QUILTS AT KEMPF HOUSE

Rob Steward and Perry Stollsteimer of the county genealogy society were to be on hand to discuss tracing German ancestors with Kempf House visitors when the house reopened February 9-10, 1-4 p.m., after the holidays.

It will be open for regular tours 1-4 p.m. on succeeding weekends. Beginning in March it will also be open 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Wednesdays with brown bag lectures at noon.

The Faculty Women's Club Quilting Section will put on a quilt show there March 16-17.

WANTED: INFO ABOUT 1894 SINGING SOCIETY

Does any reader know anything about Phoenix Singing Society, a German group founded in Ann Arbor on October 25, 1894?

Art French, president of the local Schwaben Verein, says a flag of that group was presented to them by a lady who knew only that her father or grandfather had belonged to it.

They have been unable to find any more about it. if you have any information Art would appreciate a call at 662-4964 (home) or 668-7769 (office).

PAST-PRESIDENT WEDS

Galen Wilson, past-president of WCHS 1985-87 who is now with the Chicago Public Library, married Elizabeth (Betsy) Carson on November 24, 1990, in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. They are residing in Chicago.

The young couple have "old" things in common--he's an archival specialist dealing with old manuscripts and such. She has a M.A. in history and museum management. Congratulations Galen and Betsy.

HISTORIC HAPPENINGS INVOLVE: ARTS & CRAFTS FAIR, BLACK HISTORY, VALENTINES

Chelsea Historical Society: The Society which was organized in the fall of 1974 is to have its 17th annual Founders Dinner potluck at 6 p.m. Monday, February 11, at the Railroad Depot, North Main at the tracks.

About 100 third-graders from Chelsea's South School visited the Depot Museum in December. Kathy Clark, president, and Marge Hepburn, past-president, told them about the history of the railroad depot and about the toys and the Christmas tree decorated with homemade ornaments.

Last May when the Society borrowed WCHS'S traveling "What is it?" exhibit to take to the Chelsea Methodist Home, it was also enjoyed by third graders from North School when they visited the Depot and by a civic group which met there, Marge said.

Dexter Society: Annual arts and crafts fair, 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. Saturday, March 16, at Dexter High School gymnasium, 2615 Baker Road. Museum closed until May except by appointment--call 426-2519 or 426-3352.

Manchester Society: 7:30 p.m. third Tuesday at Blacksmith Shop, 324 East Main.

Milan Society: 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Pittsfield Society: 2 p.m. first Sunday at Pittsfield Township Hall, State and Ellsworth Road.

Salem Society: A multi-media presentation about the Civil War in keeping with the theme of Black History Month will be presented by Don Riddering and Karl Gierman at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, February 28.

The meeting will be at the former Congregational Church across the street from Salem Township Hall.

The January program was about the 1907 Salem train wreck.

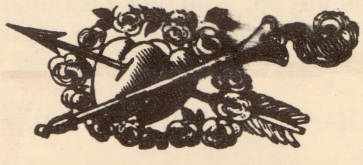
Saline Society: 7 p.m. third Wednesday at Senior Center, 7605 North Maple road. Cindy Langer of the Saline Historic District Commission will talk about Saline's historic districts at the February 20 meeting.

Webster Society: 7:45 p.m. second Monday at member homes.

Ypsilanti Society: Lacy old-fashioned valentines and local Black History will be featured in exhibits at the museum, 220 North Huron, this month.

The valentines are from the collection of Miss Ellen Gould, a retired country school teacher who will be 100 this year. She is to be honored at a Valentine tea from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, February 10, at the museum.

Regular museum hours are 2-4 p.m. Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.



CIVIC GROUPS: WCHS HAS MUSEUM SPEAKERS

If you know of a civic group in the county that would like a program about the plans and progress of the Museum on Main Street please contact the WCHS office, 662-9092.

THANKS FOR HISTORY-MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS

- to BAKER CONSTRUCTION, mason contractors, for in kind services.
- to JOHN RIETZ for the photograph of the house used on the remittance envelope in the membership mailing. (Some of you liked it so well you cut it off the return envelope to keep and sent your dues in a plain envelope.) See photo page 1.
- to LOIS and BILL FOYLE who helped stuff and label envelopes for the membership mailing.
- to PRISCILLA WOLLAMS, WCHS office volunteer on a regular schedule.
- to MARGUERITE HARMS, REEVA CRANOR, DAVID FERGUSON and LIZ COLONE who have also been coming into the office to help.
- to ASTRID and DON CLEVELAND for loan of a small refrigerator for use in the office.
- to LUCY KOOPERMAN who has volunteered to help mail *The Impressions*.

CERTIFICATE OFFERED

Hand lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826

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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2:00 P.M. SUNDAY FEBRUARY 17, 1991

JOB SKILLS & CAMPUS EVENTS BUILDING

WASHTENAW COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OFF HURON RIVER DRIVE & CLARK ROAD

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